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ABSTRACT

This bulletin focuses on workplace mentors for all students involved in work-based learning as required in the School-to-Work Opportunities Act. It reviews these key issues that should be addressed in developing an effective mentoring component in a school-to-work system: a recruitment plan for mentors; eligibility screening for mentors and students; mentor training; training sessions for students; matching students with mentors; a monitoring process and ongoing support and training; and closure steps. Two effective practices are described: (1) the Rochester, New York, school-to-work mentoring initiative that is part of a comprehensive mentoring initiative that also includes four components--workplace, community-based, school-based, and adult mentoring; and (2) the Hospital Youth Mentoring Program administered by the Johns Hopkins Hospital (Baltimore, Maryland), which has supported youth mentoring initiatives at 15 hospitals across the country. Contact and address information for the two programs is provided. The bulletin then lists seven organizations that can provide further information on the topic. Brief summaries describe the organizations' focus and activities. Fifteen resource publications are listed. (YLB)

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★RESOURCE BULLETIN

SEPTEMBER 1996

# Workplace Mentors in School-to-Work Systems

Mentors can play an important role in helping young people reach their full potential. Over the past several years, a number of studies have shown that mentoring relationships are linked to improved grades, lower dropout rates, and higher enrollment in college. Mentoring initiatives have also been shown to address wider social concerns, including a greater regard for people of other races and socio-economic backgrounds and a reduction in drug use.

Traditionally, mentoring programs have focused on youth in community and school settings, but in recent years, mentoring initiatives have emerged in workplaces across the country. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act requires workplace mentors for all students involved in work-based learning. A workplace mentor is an employee who helps a student acquire the skills, knowledge, and work habits that lead to a successful career. The mentor instructs the student, critiques the student's work, and challenges the student to perform well. Workplace mentoring initiatives in school-to-work systems share a common goal with mentoring initiatives in community and school settings. They are designed to meet the social and psychological needs of young people by initiating and supporting a long-term relationship between a mentor and a student. Building upon this foundation, work-based mentoring initiatives provide students with access to labor market opportunities, exposure to the world of work, and occupational skills training.

The workplace provides a promising environment for mentoring initiatives. Researchers at the Cornell Youth and Work Program found that the workplace is an ideal setting for mentoring because it promotes the development of relationships around a succession of workplace tasks. These tasks can absorb the initial uncertainty in a mentoring relationship, provide a focus for conversation, and a common goal to work toward. In addition, many businesses have existing mentoring programs in school and community settings, and can build upon these experiences.

Employer participation in mentoring initiatives often stems from concern for young people, but mentoring also provides benefits to employers. Mentoring fosters an atmosphere of learning, teamwork, and flexibility in the workplace, and can reduce the costs of recruiting, screening, selecting, and training new workers. Employers can obtain first-hand information on the skills, abilities, and work habits of students in mentoring programs and often hire students based on this information.

Workplace mentoring also provides a number of benefits to individual mentors. Employees who serve as mentors can develop supervisory skills and learn to work with young people. In the process of



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determining key workplace learning elements and job-specific skills they want to convey, mentors may find ways to improve their own performance. In addition, the satisfaction mentors feel when working with young people often translates into improved work habits and productivity. But perhaps the most important benefit to a mentor is the recognition that they can make a difference in the lives of young people.

This bulletin reviews key issues that should be addressed in developing an effective mentoring component in a school-to-work system, and lists organizations and publications that can assist in this process.

## Key issues

**A recruitment plan for mentors.** Developing mentoring initiatives requires a sustained effort to recruit employers and mentors. Employer recruitment plans often identify CEOs or high-level executives in organizations that are most likely to participate in mentor programs. These individuals, with the assistance of school-to-work coordinators, teachers, and parents, can then help build participation throughout the community. Successful recruitment plans also devise methods to recruit mentors within an organization once an employer has committed to participation.

**Eligibility screening for mentors and students.** Practitioners stress the importance of a well-defined application and screening process to determine the suitability of an individual for a mentoring initiative. Unsuccessful mentor relationships can occur for a variety of reasons, such as lack of time, commitment, and communication. These problems can disillusion mentors and participants, and reduce their chances of subsequent participation. An effective screening mechanism can significantly reduce the probability of problems caused by individuals who cannot fulfill the responsibilities of a mentoring program.

Staff members should select eligibility criteria to keep these occurrences at a minimum. For mentors, criteria such as commitment, time, knowledge of job-specific and general workplace skills, and the absence of a criminal history are often used in the screening process. Students' grades, attendance, behavior, and motivation or willingness to participate, are the primary determinants of their eligibility.

**Mentor training.** Many training sessions focus on the balance of challenge and support that mentors must provide in an active, work-based learning experience. Training should help mentors set challenging yet realistic goals, plan projects to meet these goals, select appropriate instruction techniques, and assess student progress. Mentors should also be trained to support students. Supportive mentors understand the different stages of adolescent development, recognize student learning preferences, encourage communication, and provide feedback. Training should also help mentors avoid potential problems or learn to work through the problems that may develop in a mentoring relationship.

Training should help mentors become familiar with program expectations, corporate and school district policies, work schedules, review processes, support services and an understanding of the roles they will be expected to fulfill. Mentors will become a role model, nurturing the student and helping them adapt to the culture of the workplace. Mentors may also be called upon to assume the role of coach, instructing a student in specific occupational skills and evaluating their performance. In some



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mentoring initiatives, one person is expected to fulfill both of these roles. Other organizations use several different coaches as a student rotates through different jobs, while maintaining one mentor, and provide training for all of these individuals.

**Training sessions for students.** Training can help students define their objectives and roles in mentoring initiatives, and prepare them for entry into the workplace. Students should understand what will be expected of them in the workplace, and be reminded that their appearance, attitude, and behavior will all influence the nature of their mentor relationship and their success in the workplace. Training should also clarify what to reasonably expect from their mentors, and what not to expect.

**Matching students with mentors.** Mentoring programs with different goals and strategies often approach matching in different ways. Many match mentors and participants based on gender, race and common interests. Others match individuals from different backgrounds to maximize exposure to different cultures and lifestyles. Regardless of these different approaches, an important element of matching is setting the stage for the critical first meeting. Mentors may make the initial meeting on their own, but group meetings that include parents and family can help ease initial contact.

**A monitoring process and ongoing support and training.** Monitoring should include consistent meetings that include school-to-work staff, mentors, participants, and, whenever possible, parents. These meetings should monitor student progress in school and the workplace, and address the student's social development. A formal, written record of these meetings can provide information to improve the individual relationship and the mentoring initiative as a whole.

Ongoing support, including recognition of achievements and peer support groups for both mentors and students, is essential to maintain long-term mentoring relationships. In addition, school-to-work staff can provide support, assistance, and training that should continue for the duration of the relationship. Ongoing training can help mentors and students work through problems and provide new activities or approaches to learning as relationships mature and students develop new areas of interest.

**Closure steps.** All mentoring relationships should include a private and confidential final meeting between students, mentors, staff, and parents. These exit interviews should include evaluations of both the program and the mentoring relationship, based on the individual and program goals. They should also help students plan for the future and include a clearly stated policy for further contact between mentor and student.

## Effective Practices

The **Rochester, NY,** school-to-work mentoring initiative is part of a comprehensive mentoring initiative developed in collaboration with the City of Rochester, the Rochester City School District, and the Rochester Mentoring Round Table. The workplace mentoring component is one of four types of mentoring initiatives that are coordinated through the Mentoring Roundtable; the other types are community-based, school-based, and adult mentoring. The roundtable coordinates monthly meetings and provides training and support to area program staff, managers, and mentors.



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The Rochester work-based mentoring initiative has five major components--recruitment, screening, training, matching, and evaluation. Their mentor recruitment process builds upon a base of participating employers in the public and private sectors. They have used the local media to reach potential mentors throughout the community. Once an employer formally agrees to participate, the CEO and the manager of human resources provide a letter of support encouraging employees to volunteer as mentors. Invitations to potential mentors within organizations have been made through newsletters, notices on bulletin boards, E-mail announcements, and discussion at staff meetings.

In the screening process, students' school records are checked, and mentors give personal and work references, indicate any arrest record, and give permission to be checked on the child abuse registry. The training includes an orientation session which provides expectations for all parties including mentors, students, teachers, and parents. Specific training for mentors focuses on their different roles and on sensitivity to the diverse cultural, economic, and societal backgrounds of students. Mentors and students are matched on common interests, students needs, and mentor preferences. At the worksite, students are assigned to a mentor who is not their worksite supervisor. They meet one hour per week to learn about the workplace and applied and technical skills. They observe successful role models in action and discuss their concerns, questions, and problems with the job.

All participants provide regular feedback to the program coordinator and the classroom teacher, and periodic meetings are held so that teachers and mentors, as well as coordinators, can closely monitor the relationship. Parents can monitor the involvement of their child by reading reports or journals submitted to the teacher by the student. This information is documented and supplemented by surveys and other quantitative data to establish legitimacy, demonstrate a reliable database, and create a track record for the mentoring initiative.

Since June 1993, the **Hospital Youth Mentoring Program**, administered by the Johns Hopkins Hospital and funded by the Commonwealth Fund, has supported youth mentoring initiatives at 15 hospitals across the nation. Five of the projects build on existing relationships between the hospital and local schools; the other ten established new relationships with schools. These initiatives target at-risk youth from low-income families, matching them with mentors to help them complete high school and make the transition to postsecondary education or work. By involving hospitals with youth from their communities, the program has encouraged the hospitals to take a more active role in addressing local community needs and in helping educate the future workforce.

Each of 15 participating hospitals is responsible for recruiting a minimum of 50 volunteer mentors from its staff to be matched, one-to-one, with neighborhood youth. The matches are made as early as seventh grade but no later than tenth grade. Mentors and youth meet every two weeks, generally at the hospital, but occasionally at school or in the community. These meetings often entail job shadowing, exposure to possible career options, academic counseling and tutoring, and emotional and psychological support.

While they work with hospital mentors, the young people explore a variety of health-care careers through internships, part-time employment at the hospital, and summer jobs. When these students reach



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their junior and senior years of high school, they are eligible to participate in a youth apprenticeship program that provides special technical training along with ongoing mentoring.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS TOPIC, CONSULT THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

## Effective Practices

**The Rochester City School District:** Peggy Weston-Byrd, 131 West Broad Street, Rochester, NY 14614 ★ (716) 454-2292.

**Hospital Youth Mentoring Program:** Deborah Knight-Kerr, 600 North Wolf Street, Baltimore, MD 21287 ★ (410) 955-1488.

## Organizations

**Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America** is the oldest mentoring project in the country and has considerable experience in all aspects of mentor initiatives and relationships, particularly in the screening and matching of volunteers. 230 North 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107 ★ (215) 576-7000.

**The Cornell Youth and Work Program** works to create an enduring initiative that will enable students to move from high school into adulthood as productive workers, active citizens, and caring family members. Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Martha Van Rensselar Hall, Cornell University, Ithica, NY 14853 ★ (607) 255-8394.

**National Worksite Supervisor Development Institute (NWSDI)** is a collaboration of Maine's Center for Career Development, Siemens Corporation, Jobs for the Future, and the Maine Technical College System. NWSDI was created to develop and deliver a progressive series of training sessions for the individuals in worksites who supervise students in school-to-work initiatives. Center for Career Development, Southern Maine Community College, Fort Road, South Portland, ME 04106 ★ (207) 767-5210.

**One to One Partnership, Inc.** The mission of One to One is to promote mentoring and economic empowerment--two strategies that connect committed adults with disadvantaged youth--for the sole purpose of changing lives for the better. One-to-One promotes mentoring through mobilizing communities, pioneering new approaches, and leveraging resources. 2801 M Street, NW, Washington, DC 20007 ★ (202) 338-3844.

**Public/Private Ventures**, a national program development and research organization, has worked extensively with mentoring programs and has recently completed a study of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentoring initiative, finding that these mentor programs have a significant positive impact on the lives of young people. 2005 Market Square, Suite 9000, Philadelphia, PA 19103 ★ (215) 592-9099.

**School & Main** works to create opportunities for at-risk youth to attain the knowledge and skills they need to reach their goals. School & Main provides mentor training workshops and other services for school-to-work systems. The Health Institute, New England Medical Center, 750 Washington Street, NEMCH No. 328, Boston, MA 02111 ★ (617) 736-3770.

**United Way of America** has worked for many years in a variety of volunteer and charitable initiatives, and provides curriculum training packages for developing mentor initiatives. 701 North Fairfax Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 ★ (703) 836-7100.

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